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Before the House Armed Services Committee

2023 Member Day Testimony

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2118 Rayburn House Office Building

Thank you, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the Committee on Armed Services, for the opportunity to submit testimony as you craft the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024.

We request that you include in the 2024 NDAA—as you did in Section 5502 of your 2023 bill—our proposal to include American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands in the Federal Employment Service by amending the Wagner-Peyser Act.

In response to objections in conference over the 2023 bill, we have tweaked last year's language with the addition of a hold harmless provision to ensure that no state loses its current funding as a consequence of including American Samoa and the Marianas in the program. And we have introduced this revised language in this Congress as the Employment Services and Jobs Parity Act, H.R. 3193

While we understand the Committee has an interest in keeping the yearly authorization focused on matters of defense, we think that encouraging economic development in American jurisdictions in the Pacific region is broadly supportive of that goal. Our nation is engaged in an overt competition for hearts, minds, and economic superiority in the Pacific with the People's Republic of China, which has proven all too willing to offer financial incentives to achieve its geo-political goals. America's best response to those overtures is to offer an economic and political model that is superior in terms of the prosperity it fosters.

Yet the districts we represent are excluded from one of the basic tools for economic development that our nation offers everywhere else in America. We need to plug that gap.

Including American Samoa and the Marianas, in the Federal Employment Service, a nationwide system of public employment offices which brings together employers looking for

workers and individuals looking for work, also bolsters the ability of the U.S. military to obtain civilian support services for the repositioning and build-up of our forces in the Western Pacific.

President Trump's Special Representative together with the Special Representatives of the Governor of the Marianas recommended the Department of Interior work cooperatively with the Department of Labor to extend the Wagner-Peyser Act to the Marianas and American Samoa. But, ultimately, of course, it is up to Congress to make this statutory change.

Now is the time.

We ask the Committee to accept our bipartisan proposal to strengthen America's economic and workforce standing in the Pacific by incorporating our legislation, H.R. 3193, in your forthcoming Defense authorization.

Thank you.